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ABSTRACT

Two techniques can be used to improve spelling scores and make spelling more interesting. The first technique is a combination of peer tutoring and the corrected-test technique. Students are paired as tutors and tutees on the basis of past spelling performance. The tutor gives a series of bi-weekly spelling tests to the tutee and helps with error correction. Research on this technique showed that all members of the class spelled more words correctly after peer tutoring than before, tutees made greater gains than their tutors, and attitudes about spelling became more positive. The second technique involves dividing the class into small groups which complete spelling exercises together. If the group is successful, members are rewarded with 15 minutes of free time; if all members of the group are not successful in scoring at least 80% on the test, they spend the 15 minutes reviewing the spelling words. This cooperative approach resulted in higher class achievement for the low spelling achievers and suggested that the better students also benefitted significantly. Both techniques utilize the positive aspects of more individualized instruction and increase student involvement. (One figure is included.) (MG)

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Raising Spelling Scores Through Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Groups

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"Aw teacher, do we have to do spelling today?" "Spelling? Now?" "Can't we do something else?" Have you heard comments like these from your students?

Then perhaps your spelling program is boring, dying on the vine, ineffective or maybe you just need to try something different. If so, then the following techniques may well be just right for you. Both techniques to be discussed have valid research support and offer spin-off benefits that make them attractive. Of course, there is no one best way to teach spelling to all students, therefore we, as teachers, feel obliged to experiment, take chances, mix and match and do whatever is necessary to achieve the desired results. In general, this is done to improve spelling scores and make spelling more interesting (motivational) to our students.

Technique # 1.

The first technique is really a combination of two techniques each of which has enjoyed success on its own. It is a coadunation of peer tutoring and the corrected-test technique (as developed by T. D. Horn in 1947.) The following is a description of how a successful teacher employed this system. She selected tutors and tutees based on past spelling performance. Students who scored above the class median were tutors and those who scored below were tutees. Twelve tutors and tutees were then paired on a one-to-one basis disregarding the sex of the students. The tutors were instructed in the goals of the program, procedures to be followed, and materials to be used. Tutorial sessions were conducted bi-weekly and

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consisted of a ten-word lesson utilizing the corrected-test technique which has been shown to account for approximately 95% of all learning that takes place in spelling (Horn, 1947, p. 303). This technique calls for the tutor to say the word, use it in a sentence and repeat the word again with the tutee writing down each of the spelling words. After all 10 words are written down by the tutee, the tutor spells all the words aloud to his partner, for example "Mouth, M-O-U-T-H, Mouth." As this is being done, the tutee marks each word as correct or incorrect. The tutor then immediately gives a retest of those same 10 words using a piece of paper to cover the first test answers so the tutee cannot see them. Again, the tutor spells the 10 words aloud at the end of the testing. This time the tutee corrects his mistakes by writing the word correctly to the side. (See Figure 1)

Research on this technique provided the following validated data: (1) both tutors and tutees spelled more words correctly after peer tutoring than before; (2) tutees made greater gains than their tutors (Remember, their initital scores were lower): (3) attitudes about spelling became more positive. (Ratanaburi, 1979)

Spin-off benefits included (1) tutors and tutees perceived each other in generally more positive ways; (2) generally, both tutors and tutees found the experience to be enjoyable; (3) the teacher was freed-up during the tutoring to provide more individualized instruction as necessary.

Technique #2.

The second technique to be proposed is also more individualized and cooperative in nature. As a matter of fact, the success of this methodology is based on group success or "I win if you win" attitudes among the students (Johnson and Johnson, 1982). This technique was effectively employed as

Figure 1

ANSWER SHEET

YOUR NAME _____ DATE _____

TUTOR'S NAME _____

Word No.	Spelling the word	Self-check with Tutor spell orally	Spelling the word again	Self-check with the Tutor. Write the word correctly.
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

reported by Lew & Bryant (1984). The teacher divided the class into groupings of 5 students each. Targeted students (low-spelling achievers) were deliberately interspersed into the groups with the remaining students randomly and heterogenously assigned. The teacher presented an orientation session on the principles of cooperative learning that would be in effect during spelling. In general, it was explained, the following would take place (Each teacher would of course modify this to meet his/her situation and needs.) (1) Each group would sit around desk and tables pulled together to maximize interaction. (2) Students were told that the spelling exercise was to be completed as a group. Students were encouraged to assist one another, check one another's work, encourage one another and in general cooperate for the good of the group. (3) Group success was equated to not less than 80% on the test by <u>each</u> group member. This obviously equated to "sink or swim" together. If the group was successful, then a reward of 15 minutes of free time was awarded on Friday. If <u>each</u> member did not score at least 80%, then the group did not receive the free time on Friday and instead spent the 15 minutes reviewing the spelling. In those cases where success was not achieved, the teacher discussed the group's responsibilities with all the group's members. (4) The teachers' role during those spelling sessions was to monitor progress, upgrade skills, and provide timely and appropriate group (and individual) feed-back. This included consistently reviewing the roles of "good" group members: assisting, questioning, checking and providing positive reinforcement. One member in each group was also assigned to be the observer during the session. The observer kept a frequency tally of participation and questioning thereby encouraging all members of the group

to participate in the total effort. The teacher helped the groups process using this frequency feedback information so as to improve interaction, participation and group results. The student assiged as observer was changed weekly with academically strong students being the initial observer. When group problems occurred, either interpersonal or academic, the teacher functioned as a resource but the group was responsible for resolving the conflict and making the required decisions to correct the problem.

As with the peer tutoring technique, this cooperative approach resulted in higher class achievement with the targeted students (low spelling achievers) improving by an average of 15.2 points and the number of perfect papers increased fourfold thereby suggesting that the better students also benefitted significantly. The spin-off benefits included the fact that students who really did not know each other became friends. Some socially withdrawn students became more assertive within the group when encouraged by the observer. Additionally, a more positive individual and intergroup appreciation for spelling was noted.

Both the techniques discussed utilize the positive aspects of more individualized instruction and increasing student involvement. Both have been tried and found to be successful. Both are adaptable and modifiable for unique classroom situations. Both are available. Both are free. Why not try one or both?

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